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## Alternative Practice: Research in Architecture Colloquium

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# ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE: RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE COLLOQUIUM

By Noel J Brady

An appreciation for the value of research in architecture, in particular the validation of activities such as *research through design*, is gaining momentum. This is a vital development when practice is in danger of being subsumed into the broader globalised agenda of international trade, becoming an addendum to a centralised dominant economic that understands cost but not value. Critical Research will be necessary to open the debate about how and why we do what we do. It must cast an eye on a priori industry-derived knowledge and with equal fervour on presumptions within the profession itself.

This colloquium organised by Emmet Scanlon and the School of Architecture at UCD in June brought Hildegarde Heynen of Ku Leuven and Murray Fraser from the Bartlett to set the scene for the future of architectural research. Heynen was particularly effective in identifying why architecture finds itself excluded from research categories. It has been difficult to identify just where it should find a home, whether in the social sciences, art practices or technical processes. This was in evident in the broad membership of this nascent research community (<http://aiarg.webs.com>), confirming the breath of interest from the theoretical to the technical.

*"Why stay in college? Why go to night school? / Gonna be different this time / Can't write a letter, can't send a postcard, / I can't write nothing at all.... / Burned all my notebooks, what good are / notebooks? They won't help me survive." ('Life during Wartime', Talking Heads, 1979)*

## Relevance

*"The social contract between the state and the profession, by which the title architect is a legal term, offers a (potential) monopoly to the profession in return for the safe management of an area of (unsafe) knowledge." (The Illegal Architect by Jonathan Hill, 1998 Black Dog Publishing Limited)*

In *The Illegal Architect*, Jonathan Hill identifies how the profession can "in an act of self-delusion, sustain its mastery of architecture", through well-established procedures such as displacing buildings with photographs of (empty) buildings or drawings (of an unbuilt project) or a theory (of an abstracted architecture).

Steadily building a case for autonomy within the profession and the discipline (academia), has made each vulnerable to the point of being ignored. The death of the profession has been flagged for years but recent events appear to accelerate the possibility. At the very least it will be hastened. The one approved model of practice has proving unwieldy in dealing with the rapidly evolving social and economic condition.

## Alternative Practice

*"Is this the kind of place you wanna live? / Is this were you wanna be? / Is this the only life we're gonna have? / What we need is.... Alternative Ulster ... Pull it together now." ('Alternative Ulster', Stiff Little Fingers, 1978)*

As a revolution against popular music, Punk initiated much needed music experimentation, providing a platform for the dissatisfied and disenfranchised. In Ireland 'Alternative Ulster' by Stiff Little Fingers was a signpost, an

alternative to the bipolar political landscape of Belfast. Architecture is in need of such signposts. Initiatives such as the RIAI's 3 Twenty 10 research competition and the All Ireland Research Group point the way. Attendees at the colloquium bear witness to this and, importantly, some who are not legal architects but have architecture close to their hearts. It is at this edge of practice and discipline where collaboration is more likely; where the boundaries have yet to be formed that valuable work can be done. The colloquium offered up many suggestions for investigation. Yet what we really need is alternative practice.

## Life During Wartime

We are challenged to be better people, better architects. It demands a new vision for practice that is critical, relevant and ethical. The AIARG are holding a mini conference on 20 and 21 January 2012 at the DIT School of Architecture & Urban Design, which hopes to draw upon the interests.

*"...everything will depend on the effort made and on the attention paid to these alarming symptoms. Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided". (P 307, Vers une Architecture (Towards Architecture), Le Corbusier, 1928, Frances Lincoln Edition, 2008)*

## RIAI Colloquium: Schools of Architecture and Local Government (Action 38)

by Sandra O'Connell

Responding to Action 38 of the Government Policy on Architecture, a colloquium was held on 19 May 2011 at the RIAI to examine how schools of architecture can contribute (and are contributing) to addressing built environment design challenges at local level. The colloquium was attended by international keynote speakers, members of the City and County Managers Association (CCMA), Directors of architectural programmes at Irish universities, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) and by the RIAI.

The colloquium opened with a presentation by Martin Colreavy (Chief Architect, DAHG) on Ireland's Government Policy on Architecture. It heard examples of current research by Schools of Architecture at the larger urban design scale and how it interfaces with local authorities and real life projects (Professor Merrit Bucholz, SAUL and Professor Mary Corcoran, Maynooth University). Local authorities discussed the synergies between real life research projects and local governance (David O'Connor, Fingal County Manger) and how design thinking can change process.

Professor Laura Lee, Carnegie Mellon University presented her acclaimed *Integrated Design Strategy for Adelaide* (AUS), discussing how design thinking can transform outcome and empower communities. Henk Ovink, National Spatial Strategy Director, Netherlands and Co-curator International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam 2012, discussed the importance of flexible design strategies that respond to change and the need to develop new alliances outside the design world. The colloquium was chaired by RIAI President Paul Keogh, who generated an important discussion on design thinking and its applications in Ireland – in education, governance and practice.

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